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SIPDIS

PACOM FOR VADM CROWDER, COMMANDER, 7TH FLEET

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TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [OVIP](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VADM CROWDER'S VISIT TO MALAYSIA

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF MARK D. CLARK, REASON 1.4
(B AND D).

Summary

¶1. (C) Malaysia is important to us because it is an economically successful, stable, predominantly Muslim country that, over the longer term, may be able to support us more strongly in places like the Middle East. It is strategically located on the Straits of Malacca, through which one quarter of the world's trade flows, and it borders five of the other nine ASEAN countries. Military-to-military cooperation is improving, with 9 US Navy ship visits to Malaysian ports thus far in 2008, 22 visits in 2007, and 23 in 2006. This is up from only five ship visits in 2003. Recently initiated engagement with the Royal Malaysian Navy's developing submarine force has successfully forged a relationship in this critical warfare capability. Our security relationship also finds expression in regular high level visits and counterpart visits. Behind the scenes, Malaysia has been a good partner in the war on terror. The overall tone in Malaysian-American relations has improved considerably since Abdullah Badawi became Prime Minister in late-2003, and we seek to translate this into substantive improvements. Bilateral relations eroded under Abdullah's vituperative predecessor Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, but Abdullah brought with him a friendlier style and an interest in projecting a more moderate image, both for himself and for his country.

¶2. (C) While the surprise results of the March 2008 election have remade Malaysia's political landscape and severely shaken the ruling coalition, our bi-lateral relations have remained on an even keel. Malaysia is our sixteenth largest trading partner, and many major American companies have invested here. We have increased senior-level exchanges since Abdullah came aboard, for example conducting our first ever Senior Dialogue with the Foreign Ministry at the Assistant Secretary level in May 2005. Malaysia has acceded to the IAEA Additional Protocol, and participates as an observer in PSI exercises. Malaysia has played a positive role in helping to stabilize Aceh, Mindanao, and East Timor. Malaysia's traditional approach to global issues, which Abdullah has continued albeit at a lower decibel level, remains an impediment to closer bilateral cooperation. Malaysia actively participates in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), often adopting distinctly third-world positions on issues of importance to us. Our public affairs environment is also challenging. The Malaysian public is strongly opposed to our policies in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. A strong "post-colonial overhang" also colors Malaysian attitudes toward the U.S. role in Southeast Asia. With Abdullah we have nevertheless been able to pursue a set of broad common interests, and pragmatism generally rules in

bilateral security relations. End Summary.

Security Cooperation

13. (C) The bilateral military interaction remains strong; and we, along with Embassies Jakarta and Manila, are implementing the Regional Security Initiative (RSI) concept through a maritime policymakers' conference in Sabah. The objective is to encourage the three nations to share information, data and intelligence on a national interagency level and tri-laterally to create a common operational picture to enhance their effectiveness in maritime enforcement. These visits, and the relationships developed, have fostered strong mil-mil cooperation between the United States and Malaysia, and have not been adversely impacted by recent leadership changes. Ship visits have significantly increased and received greater visibility. Security-related training sponsored by the United States for military and law enforcement participants, including Malaysia's new coast guard, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, has also been on the rise. Although the possibility of a terrorist threat to the Malacca Strait has received the bulk of international attention, the fact is that although pirate attacks illustrate vulnerabilities, we have never identified any terrorist activities in the Straits. Conversely, terrorists operate regularly in the Sulu/Sulawesi Sea corridor and we are focusing increasingly on this theater.

14. (C) The Malaysian-initiated coordinated surface patrols and "Eyes in the Sky" program, a regional aerial monitoring of the Straits of Malacca, have been more effective in creating a perception of security than actual operational capability. However, a reduction in incidents of piracy and improved risk assessment by Lloyds of London has eliminated the GOM's resource allocation to the programs and they continue in their limited implementation. A pirate attack and kidnapping of sailors in the Straits on August 13, 2007, was the first high-seas abduction in over two years but was followed in April 2008 by another violent attack and robbery have captured attention.

15. (C) Malaysia concluded a new 505 agreement in 2006 that will allow us to utilize 1206 funds to put CT equipment into the vulnerable Sulu and Sulawesi Seas border areas of Sabah where terrorists are known to transit. Congress has approved funds for building and installing coastal radars in eastern Sabah and the first sites have been identified and contracted. A joint forces command and control center funded under 1206 is planned for this year to functionally link the various radar sites. Malaysia has not signed either a PSI or Article 98 agreement. In general, Malaysia remains open to bilateral cooperation that strengthens its own defense capacity, but the GOM will quickly raise the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity when discussing international security regimes and coordination, such as for the Straits of Malacca. Malaysia's only multilateral defense arrangement is the Five Power Defense Arrangement, in place since the 1940's, with the UK, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

16. (S) we have been pleased by the overwhelmingly positive media coverage our ship visits have received, in contrast to the quiet arrivals of past years. The flip side to this is that our visits could attract increased attention from ideological foes on the Islamist right, and from some mainstream politicians pandering to the conservative Islamic vote. Deputy Prime Minister Najib has stoutly defended our cooperation before Parliament, and we do not see that our engagement is under threat. However, we do need to be cognizant of our increased military visibility and sensitive to GOM concerns, particularly with high tensions in the Middle East. The GOM cited concerns about the growing visibility of training in eastern Sabah and, in 2006, decided to review on a case basis proposed training events involving foreign military forces in that region.

17. (C) Malaysia has an excellent record in UN Peacekeeping

Operations. They have committed forces to various UN operations since the early 1960s. Currently, 360 Malaysian troops are participating in Malaysia's second rotation to UNIFIL (Lebanon) and the GOM has offered a contingent of up to 1000 soldiers if the need arises. Malaysia has a well developed Peacekeeping Training Center that provides specialized training for the troops it sends into the field as well as personnel from foreign militaries. The USG has obligated almost 1.1 million dollars for GPOI funds that focus on developing Malaysia's PKO training to UN DPKO standards.

18. (S) Malaysia maintains friendly relations with Iran, including a growing commercial relationship. The Foreign Ministry's support for Iran's attempted participation in a Defense Services Asia (DSA) military sales exhibition, held in Kuala Lumpur April 2008, highlights the challenges we face on the Iran issue. Iran initially was permitted to exhibit weapons at the arms show and their exhibit, which violated UN sanctions, was only dismantled after strong interventions by the U.S. and others. De facto opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim criticized the Malaysian government for bowing to U.S. pressure on this matter. Malaysia has lent rhetorical support to Iran's right to develop "peaceful" nuclear technology but has also consistently maintained that it will implement UN decisions on Iran, including sanctions regimes. After the latest UNSC resolution, Prime Minister Abdullah called for Iran to respect UNSC resolutions on its nuclear program. Malaysia, however, has not yet submitted its report to the UN on implementation of UNSC sanctions or taken other discernible actions to implement the UN restrictions on Iran.

Recent actions by Malaysian firms have generated concerns of violations of U.S. laws and the Massena Arrangement and a Malaysian company was among those recently sanctioned under the Iran Non-proliferation Act for its role in shipping proscribed materials to Iran. The activities of local firms doing business with Iran need to be closely monitored. One Malaysian firm has signed an agreement for a multi-billion dollar investment to develop enormous natural gas fields in Iran, a deal which has drawn condemnation from U.S. congressional voices in light of the Iran Sanctions Act. Additionally, Iranian and Malaysian firms have recently inked deals to develop oil refineries in both Malaysia and Iran, and Iran is purported to be a principal investor in a proposed oil pipeline to span northern Malaysia and link the Andaman and South China Seas.

Recent Mil-Mil Talks

19. (C) In May 2007, Malaysia hosted the annual Bilateral Training and Consultative Group (BITACG) meeting in Port Dickson. BITACG is a forum used to promote and strengthen mil-mil relations through discussions of bilateral exercises, intelligence exchanges, C4 issues, logistics engagement, and defense cooperation. Malaysia also hosted a BITACG mid-year review in Kuala Lumpur in November 2007. Additionally, Malaysia co-hosted an annual conference for military intelligence chiefs in the Asia-Pacific region (APICC) held in September 2007. In September 2006, the U.S. Navy initiated annual Submarine Staff Talks which have been successful in fostering a close relationship with the Royal Malaysian Navy as they develop their Scorpene submarine program.

10. (SBU) Malaysia has put forth a regional Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Center initiative that is promising, and has wide support in the government. The MAF has identified Subang Airfield as a likely choice for the center which would be administered under UN (World Food Program - WFP) auspices. Subang, the former international airport, served as the focal point for Malaysia's tsunami and Yogyakarta relief efforts. The facilities are modern and are available. Malaysia is an ideal location for a regional HA/DR center- centrally located, modern, stable, and Islamic. Malaysia is no further than two hours by air to almost any country in the region. Avian influenza (AI) preparedness is another promising area of bilateral cooperation. The

Ministry of Health and the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) Health Services have been excellent partners in conducting preparedness training for pandemic influenza. Previous assessment teams (PACOM and MARFORPAC) have assessed Malaysia as a significant country in assisting in a pandemic influenza response. While not identified as a donor nation, Malaysia has the potential to assist in a regional response in the near term. To date, PACOM has provided an AI Subject Matter exchange and a bioterrorism workshop co-hosted by the Ministry of Health and MAF Health Services. The country team has requested exercises on medical surveillance and containment of a pandemic outbreak. PACOM's efforts in furthering Malaysia's capacity as a regional responder are critical to the country team in this regard.

Bilateral Ties--Working to Improve the Substance

¶11. (S) In our bilateral relations, the GOM has begun matching improvements in tone with improvements in substance. PM Abdullah has openly espoused improved relations with the U.S., and values the good rapport he established in his meetings with the President. In 2006, Secretary Rice met with PM Abdullah and FM Hamid at the ASEAN Regional Forum and President Bush met with PM Abdullah on the sidelines of the UNGA. Also in 2006, the GOM acceded to our long-standing urging and signed the IAEA Additional Protocol; and the Malaysians have also started sending observers to recent PSI exercises. Nevertheless, Malaysia's support for U.S. positions in the United Nations has not improved under Abdullah as Malaysia consistently votes in disagreement with the United States on nearly all measures we have classified as "important votes."

¶12. (C) Beneath the turbulent power politics, we continue to benefit from close counter-terrorism cooperation, albeit with Guantanamo access an increasingly sore point. Although they keep the details closely held, the GOM has been a key partner on counterterrorism. Early round-ups in 2001-2002 of scores of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) suspects helped ensure there have been no terrorist attacks here. However, Malaysian extremists, as illustrated by a series of arrests in Malaysia's Borneo states in 2006, still have the capability to support JI operations elsewhere. Two Malaysian citizens were among the 14 high value U.S. detainees transferred to Guantanamo in 2006. In 2003, Malaysia established the Southeast Asia Regional Center for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT), which runs a full schedule of GOM-focused and multilateral training courses, many conducted with U.S. support. We and our colleagues in Manila, Jakarta and other Southeast Asian posts have embarked on a regional effort to strengthen these countries' border controls. In cooperation with GOM, we undertook a Border Control Assessment Initiative (BCAI) in eastern Sabah with participants from the Department of State, Homeland Security, USCG and JIATF West. We are providing some technical assistance to the GOM for the drafting of an export control law -- important to our non-proliferation goals -- but Malaysia has moved very slowly on establishing an export control regime.

Malaysian Foreign Policy and U.S. -- A Mixed Bag

¶13. (S) Abdullah champions his development-focused vision of Islam -- albeit with limited impact to date -- within the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which Malaysia will continue to chair through early 2008. Malaysia supports Abbas, Fatah, the MEPP roadmap, and Iraqi reconstruction. However, the Malaysian public remains highly critical of our Middle East policies, and the GOM is consistently critical of Israel, with which it has no diplomatic relations. Malaysia attended the Annapolis Conference last November, and has expressed a keen interest in helping further the MEPP.

¶14. (S) Malaysia surrendered the chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement in September 2006, but as past chair remains a member of the leadership troika. During Malaysia's tenure it supported NAM positions defending Iran's

nuclear program, and engaged with such problematic international players as Zimbabwe, Cuba and Venezuela. The GOM nevertheless tells us that they argued for moderate approaches within the NAM on such issues as Iran. Abdullah hosted Hugo Chavez for a visit to Malaysia in August 2007, and assured Chavez of his support for Venezuela's election to the Latin American chair on the UN Security Council. This was followed by a well publicized visit to Venezuela by Abdullah in December to explore stronger commercial ties. In October 2007, North Korean Premier Kim Jung Il visited Malaysia with a large economic entourage.

¶15. (C) Nevertheless, the GOM issued a public condemnation of North Korea's nuclear testing and publicly supports UNSCR 1718, although it has no enthusiasm for sanctions. In the past, Malaysia supported the return to the six-party DPRK nuclear talks and criticized North Korea's truculence. The Malaysian government is publicly supportive of China's "peaceful rise", welcoming in particular China's growing imports of Malaysian products, despite lingering suspicions among some officials of China's long-term intentions.

¶16. (C) Malaysia has played an increasingly prominent role in addressing conflicts facing its Southeast Asian neighbors. In 2006 Malaysia completed its earlier peacekeeping mission to East Timor following the armed uprising that led to deployment of Australian, Malaysian and Portuguese forces, and dispatched a new deployment of Malaysian police to that country. The GOM has also taken a leading role as the facilitator for the southern Philippines peace process. Malaysia's sympathies for the Muslim Moro population and geopolitical calculations vis-a-vis the Philippines do not make it a neutral broker, but Malaysia has nonetheless hosted negotiations and contributed observers to the International Monitoring Team in the southern Philippines. Malaysia's recent decision to withdraw its soldiers from the International Monitoring Team in Mindanao as a means to pressure Manila in the MILF negotiations could result in an end to Malaysia's facilitation role. Geography and cross-border ethnic bonds make Malaysia a de facto safe haven for southern Thai insurgents, though the GOM has not supported or encouraged this. The Malaysians have urged the Thai government to resolve peacefully the unrest in Southern Thailand, with its ethnic Malay Muslim population, and Malaysia and Thailand are cooperating on new border security measures. Malaysia is especially chagrined by Burma's intransigence and political crackdown on the recent democracy movement, especially since Malaysia championed Burma's entry into ASEAN. Although they have publicly criticized the Burmese regime, PM Abdullah and FM Hamid appear to be at a loss as to what to do next. Malaysia joined other ASEAN nations in condemning Burma's actions against the protesting Buddhist monks in September but has otherwise taken a staunchly non-interference position in regards to Burma's domestic politics. Most recently, the GOM refused to join the U.S., E.U., and others in condemning the Burma's referendum process on a proposed constitution. The GOM firmly backs the consensus ASEAN argument that Burma is not a threat to international peace and security.

Political/Economic Landscape

¶17. (C) The surprise results of the March 2008 election have remade Malaysia's political landscape and severely shaken the ruling coalition. A resurgent opposition increased its parliamentary representation from 22 to 82 seats, denying the Ruling party a two-thirds majority for the first time in decades. In the wake of this election shock, the political scene remains fluid and UMNO's leadership question unresolved. PM Abdullah Badawi so far has persevered in the face of calls to immediately step down from within his UMNO party, acknowledging that he eventually would resign in favor of Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, but only after reelection as party president in December 2008 and a further two-year grace period. Despite urgings from other UMNO leaders, Najib has not pressured Abdullah. An active push by Najib or heightened concern over losing power due to

sharp opposition challenges could result in UMNO elites pushing Abdullah out prior to the December 2008 party assembly.

¶18. (C) The embattled Abdullah has seemingly courted public support outside UMNO by announcing planned policy reforms he originally promised in 2004. These include a judicial appointments commission and a strengthened Anti-Corruption Agency, measures more popular with the opposition, which is also calling for a repeal of the Internal Security Act (ISA). Abdullah also has scaled back plans to reduce fuel subsidies, recognizing his weakened administration could not carry such unpopular actions. With UMNO divided and a more prominent (and potentially powerful) opposition, Malaysia is experiencing greater press freedom, though as the Home Ministry's recent politically motivated closure of a Tamil newspaper demonstrated, no permanent legal reforms underpin the current democratic openings. The state retains authoritarian levers from the Mahathir era.

¶19. (S) The opposition Peoples' Alliance, led by Anwar Ibrahim, is testing itself in four newly-claimed state governments, including Malaysia's richest state Selangor (surrounding Kuala Lumpur). In their first weeks in power, opposition state executives tried to set themselves apart from UMNO and its National Front (BN) by addressing ethnic minority grievances, promoting clean governance, and announcing populist economic decisions. Abdullah's central government is fighting back by redirecting federal revenue support outside of state government channels and in some cases setting up parallel local authorities. In Parliament opposition MPs have marching orders to aggressively challenge the government side at every turn, and Parliament's first session on April 30 immediately descended into a cacophony of insults. Anwar continues to publicly prod BN with claims that he has 30 BN MPs ready to cross over, which would bring down the BN government. UMNO elites, who have never lost power, would be sorely tempted to preempt such a move by imposing emergency measures, and rumors of the government's intention to use ISA provisions of imprisonment without trial have circulated within the opposition.

¶20. (C) Malaysia has been a difficult political partner in the past. Malaysians nurse strong anti-colonial sentiments. They are fiercely protective of their sovereignty and (among the Muslim Malay majority) resent perceived ill treatment of Islam by the West. Malaysian intellectuals tend to hold a "Euroskeptic" view of U.S. foreign policy in general and like to cast themselves as defenders of "third world" interests. Former Prime Minister Mahathir played on these sentiments to generate political support for himself and his ambitious economic agenda. When he relinquished his post in 2003, he left behind a modernized economy but also strained relations with much of the West. Today, however, Malaysia presents us with important transformational opportunities. In terms of its economic development, educational achievement, public welfare, and political stability, Malaysia stands out among Muslim-majority nations. The Malaysians project a version of Islam that emphasizes modern learning and economic development, and, over the longer term, could lend additional support to progressive forces in the Middle East and Iraq. We also share strong common East Asian regional interests in stability and prosperity. Malaysian counter-terrorism cooperation is indispensable in defeating Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in the region.

¶21. (C) Malaysia's economy is among the more open, diverse, and better-developed within the Islamic world and in ASEAN. The United States is Malaysia's largest trading partner, and Malaysia is now the 16th largest trading partner for the United States after two-way bilateral trade dropped 12 percent in 2007 to \$46 billion in 2007, but strong trading relationships remain in the electronics and energy sectors. Malaysia believes it has limited direct exposure to the U.S. sub-prime market in part because of lessons learned from the 1997-8 Asian financial crisis, though it does expect the economic slowdown in the U.S. will dampen growth in Malaysia

this year. While the U.S. was Malaysia's largest source of foreign direct investment for more than a decade, Japan surpassed U.S. FDI to Malaysia in 2006 after the signing of a limited trade partnership agreement between those two countries. This year, a joint venture between a private Malaysian company and the National Iranian Oil Company to build a refinery here has put Iran as the largest foreign investor year-to-date, while the U.S. has slipped to fifth place after the Netherlands, Japan, and Singapore.

Malaysia's "Civilizational Islam"

¶22. (C) Malaysia is hardly an ideal democracy, but it can still serve as a reference point for evolving Islamic societies elsewhere. The Malay people, traditionally known for their social tolerance, have become more religiously conservative in recent years, but Prime Minister Abdullah has enshrined the Malay political elite's continued preference for moderation in his "Islam Hadhari" or "Civilizational Islam" policy. Abdullah's key message is that Islam can become a leading world civilization again only if it embraces economic development, education, innovation and tolerance. Observers are wary of a longer-term trend toward greater divisions between the Muslim Malay majority and other ethnic groups, and religious minorities increasingly complain of growing Islamization, as highlighted by the controversy surrounding Deputy Prime Minister Najib's comments last year that Malaysia is an "Islamic state." Nevertheless, Malaysia has kept inter-ethnic tensions well under control by regional and world standards for almost 40 years.

Suggested Talking Points

¶23. (U) We suggest the following talking points for your official meetings in Malaysia.

-- Thank Malaysia for their hosting of a notable increase in ship visits and note the positive media attention these visits have received.

-- Burma: We urge Malaysia join us in taking an active role in encouraging Burma to permit urgently needed humanitarian assistance to enter the country and to grant international humanitarian relief workers access to the affected areas. How could Malaysia and the U.S. cooperate in assisting the Burmese population?

-- Congratulate Malaysia's efforts in combating Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and other terrorist groups, including efforts to deny terrorist transit through the tri-border area of the Sulu and Sulawesi seas. Note our excellent cooperation on CT issues and hopes that this will continue.

-- Note Malaysia's role as a facilitator for the southern Philippines peace process, and express our desire to see progress in the talks despite Malaysia's recent decision to withdraw its soldiers from the International Monitoring Team in Mindanao.

-- Iran: Stress the importance we place on international respect for the UNSC resolutions as a means to support a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear program.

KEITH